Abyssal Current Steering of Upper Ocean Current Pathways in an Ocean Model with High Vertical Resolution

by

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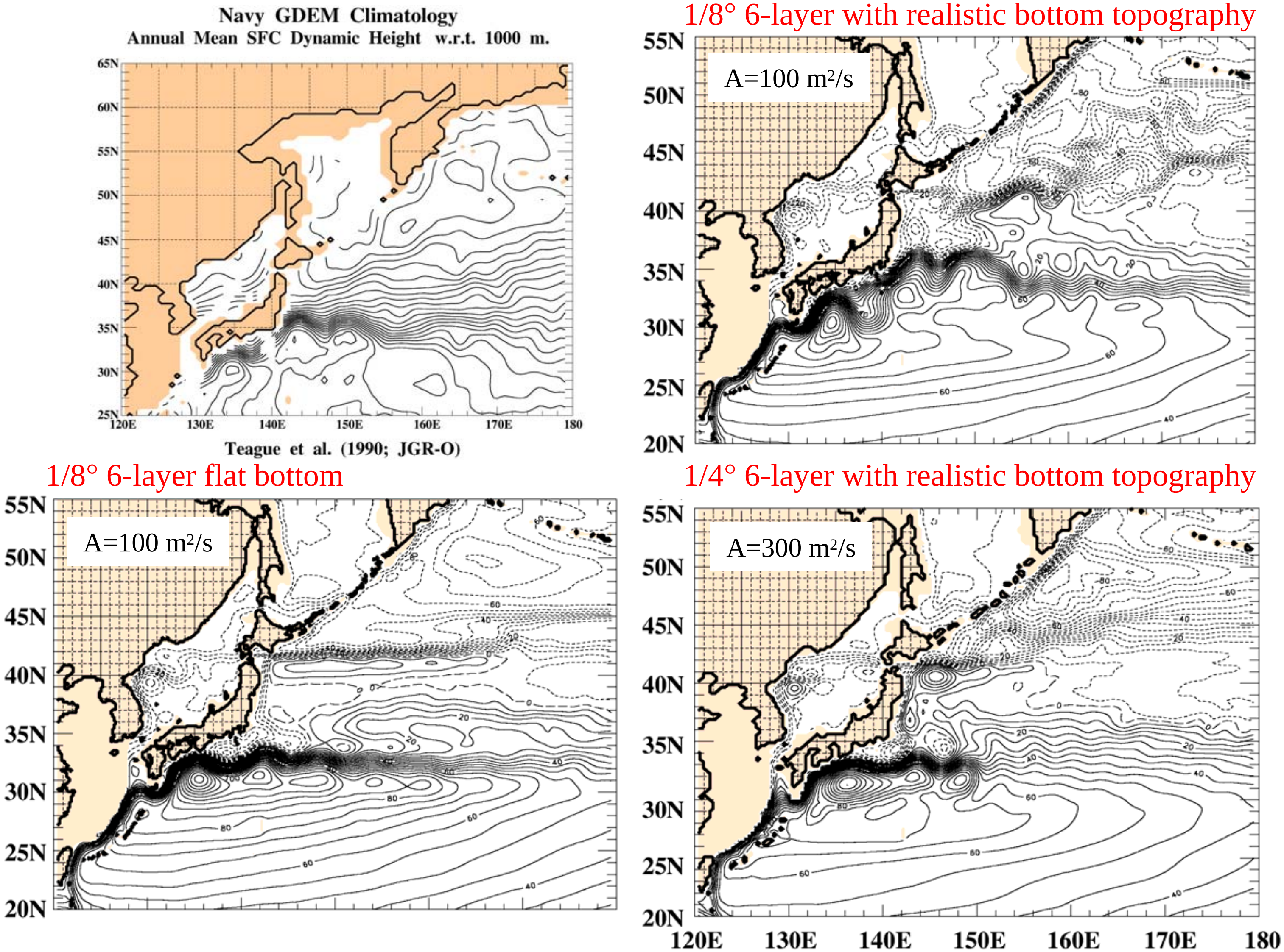
Kuroshio Pathway East of Japan
Impact of topography and model resolution



Model mean sea surface height forced by Hellerman and Rosenstein (1983, JPO) wind stress climatology

From Hurlburt et al. (1996, JGR-O; 1997, Intl WOCE Newsletter)

Bottom Current Steering of Upper Ocean Current Pathways

In a two-layer model, the continuity equation for layer 1 is

$$\frac{\partial h_1}{\partial t} + h_1 \nabla \cdot \vec{v}_1 + \vec{v}_1 \cdot \nabla h_1 = 0 \qquad (1)$$

The advective term in (1) can be related to the layer 2 velocity by

$$\vec{v}_{1g} \cdot \nabla h_1 = \vec{v}_{2g} \cdot \nabla h_1 \qquad (2)$$

$$\hat{k} \times f\left(\vec{v}_{1g} - \vec{v}_{2g}\right) = -g' \nabla h_1 \qquad (3)$$

Since $$\left|\vec{v}_1\right| >> \left|\vec{v}_2\right| \qquad (4)$$

∇h_1 is a good measure of $\vec{v}_1$.

From this, we see that abyssal currents affect the advection of upper layer thickness gradients and therefore the pathways of upper layer currents.
(Hurlburt and Thompson, 1980, JPO; Hurlburt et al., 1996, JGR-O)

Application of the 2-layer Theory for Abyssal Current Advection of Upper Ocean Current Pathways to Models with Higher Vertical Resolution

Applies when all of the following are satisfied:

a) The flow is nearly geostrophically balanced

b) The barotropic and first baroclinic modes are dominant

c) The topography does not intrude significantly into the stratified ocean

The interpretation in terms of surface currents applies when $\left|\vec{\mathbf{v}}_{\text{near sfc}}\right| \gg \left|\vec{\mathbf{v}}_{\text{abyssal}}\right|$

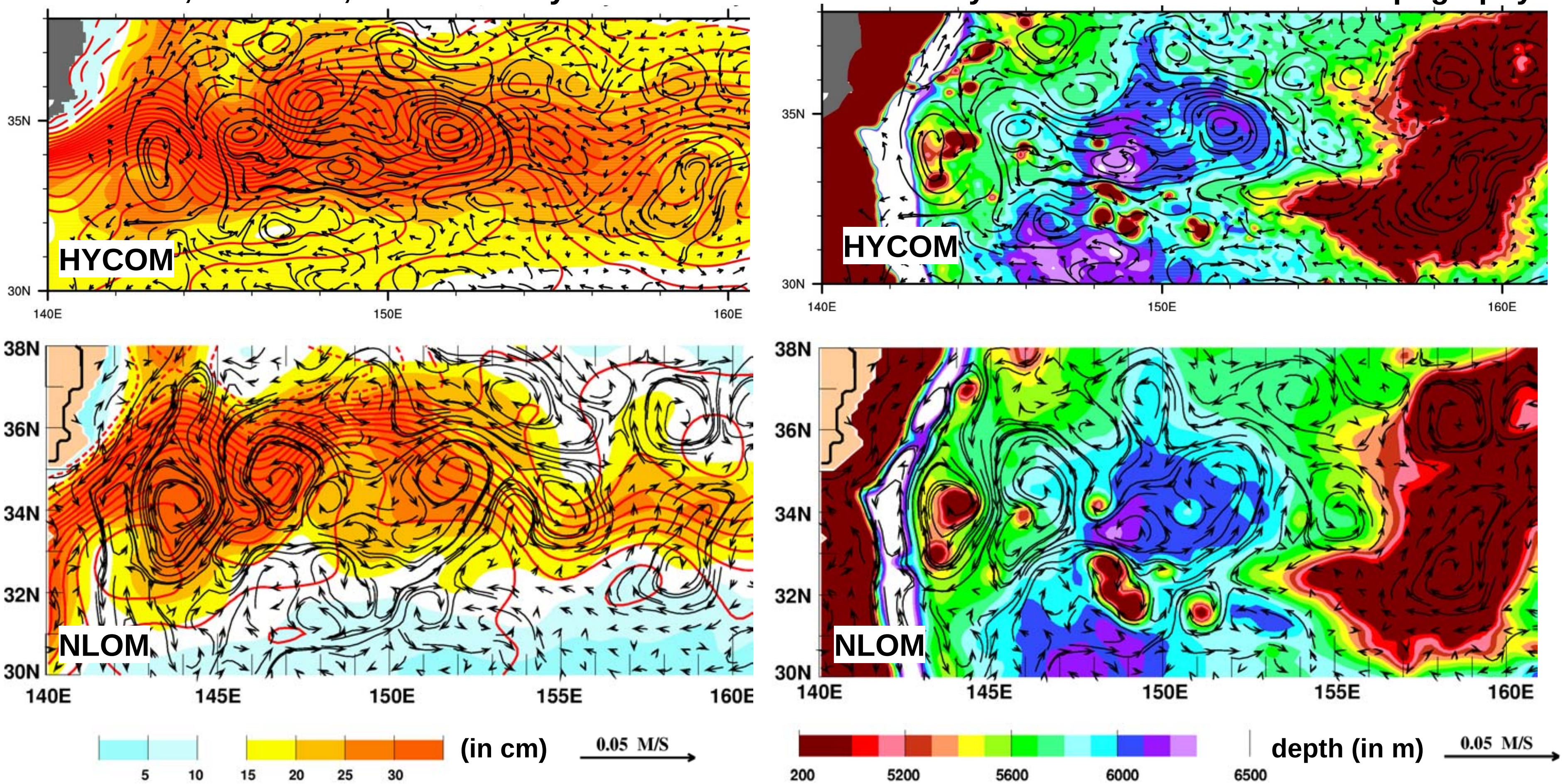
Notes:

1) The theory does not apply at low latitudes because of a) and b)

2) Abyssal current advection of upper ocean current pathways is strengthened when the currents intersect at large angles, but often the end result of this advection is near barotropy

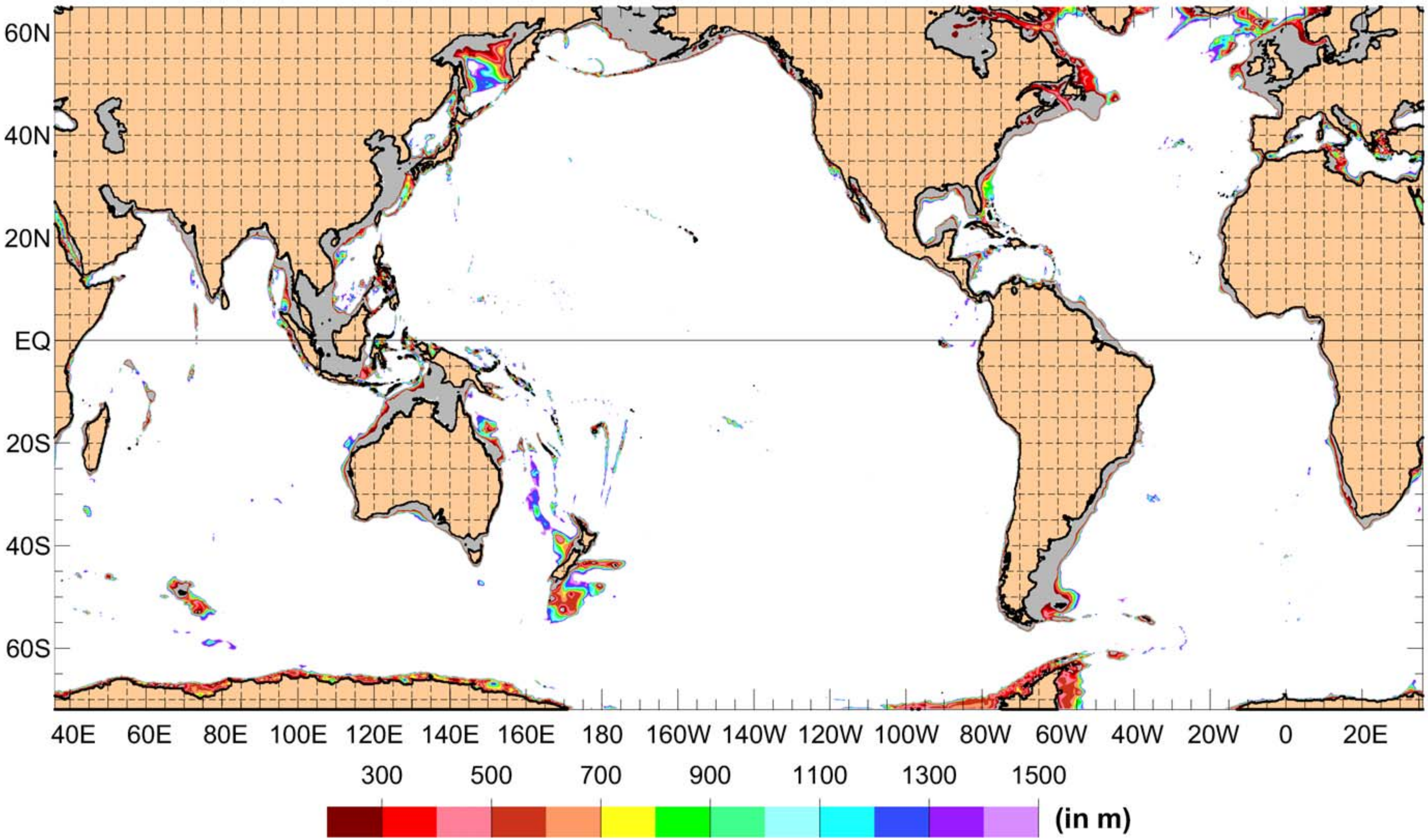
Upper Ocean – Topographic Coupling in the Kuroshio Extension
1/12°, 20-Layer Pacific HYCOM vs. 1/8° 6-Layer NLOM

Mean SSH, RMS SSH, and mean abyssal currents | **Mean abyssal currents and bottom topography**



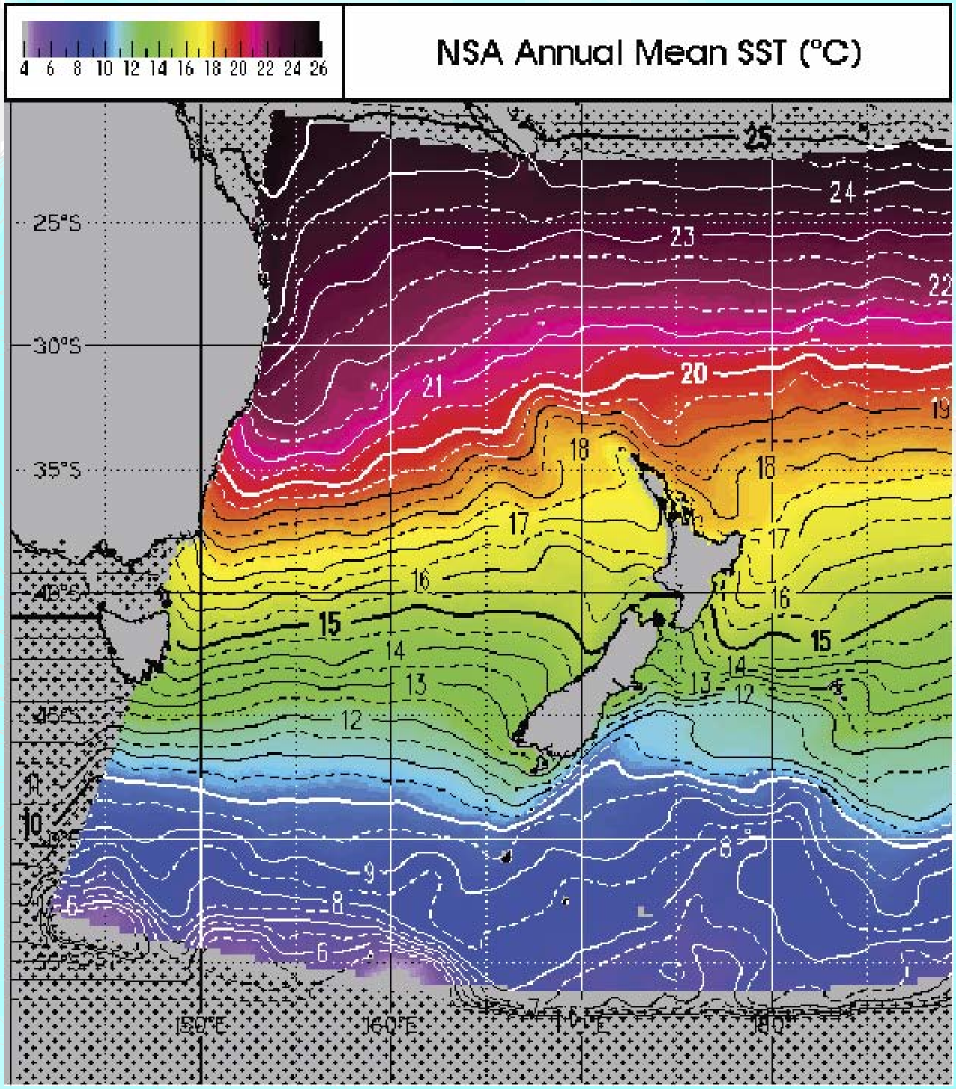
Adapted from Hurlburt et al. (2006; DAO submitted) and Hurlburt et al. (1996; JGR-O)

Global ocean depths between 200 m and 1500 m



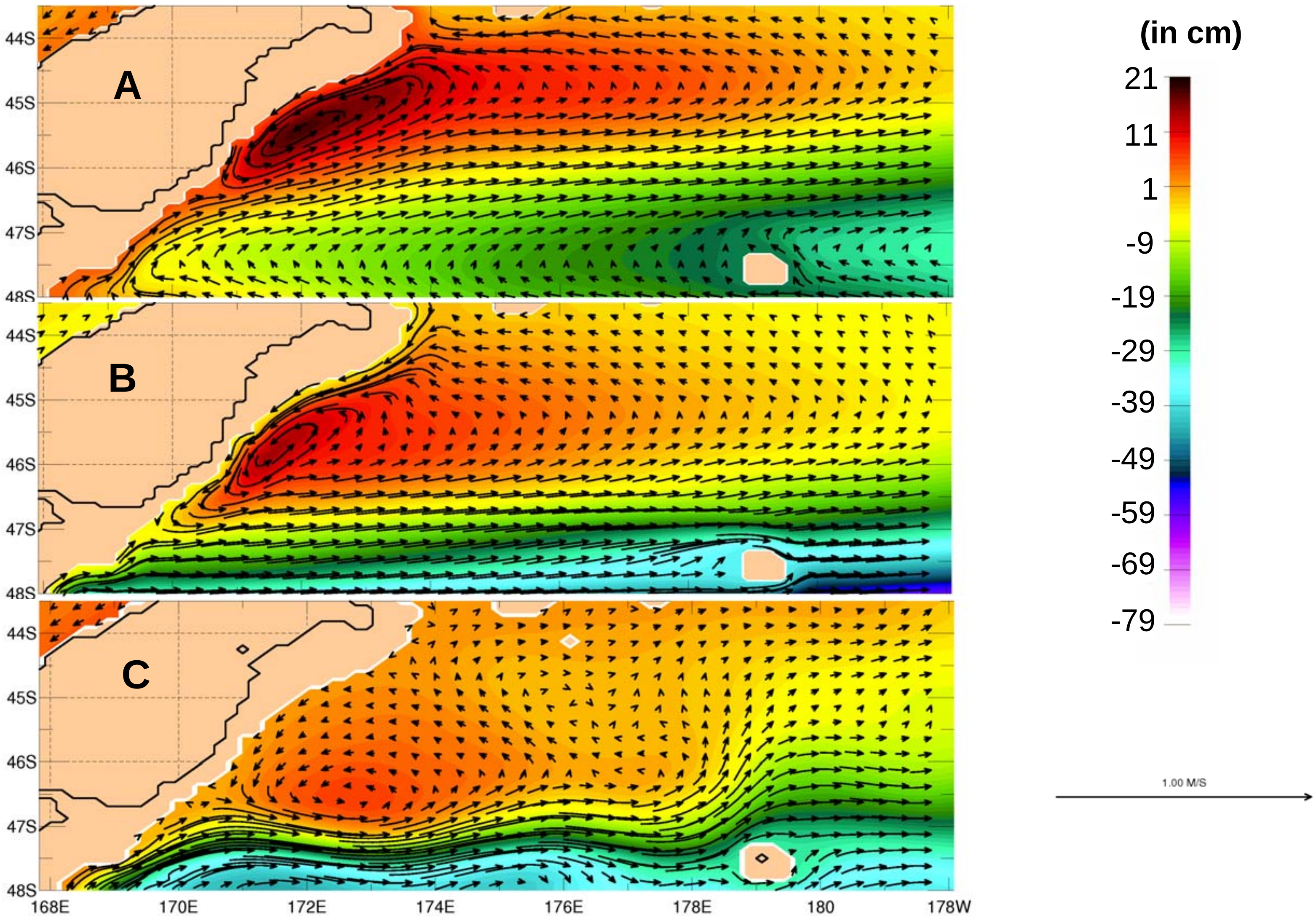
Only 6.5% of the seafloor lies in the depth range 200-1500 m

Mean Sea Surface Temperature Around New Zealand



- Uddstrom and Oien, JGR (1999)

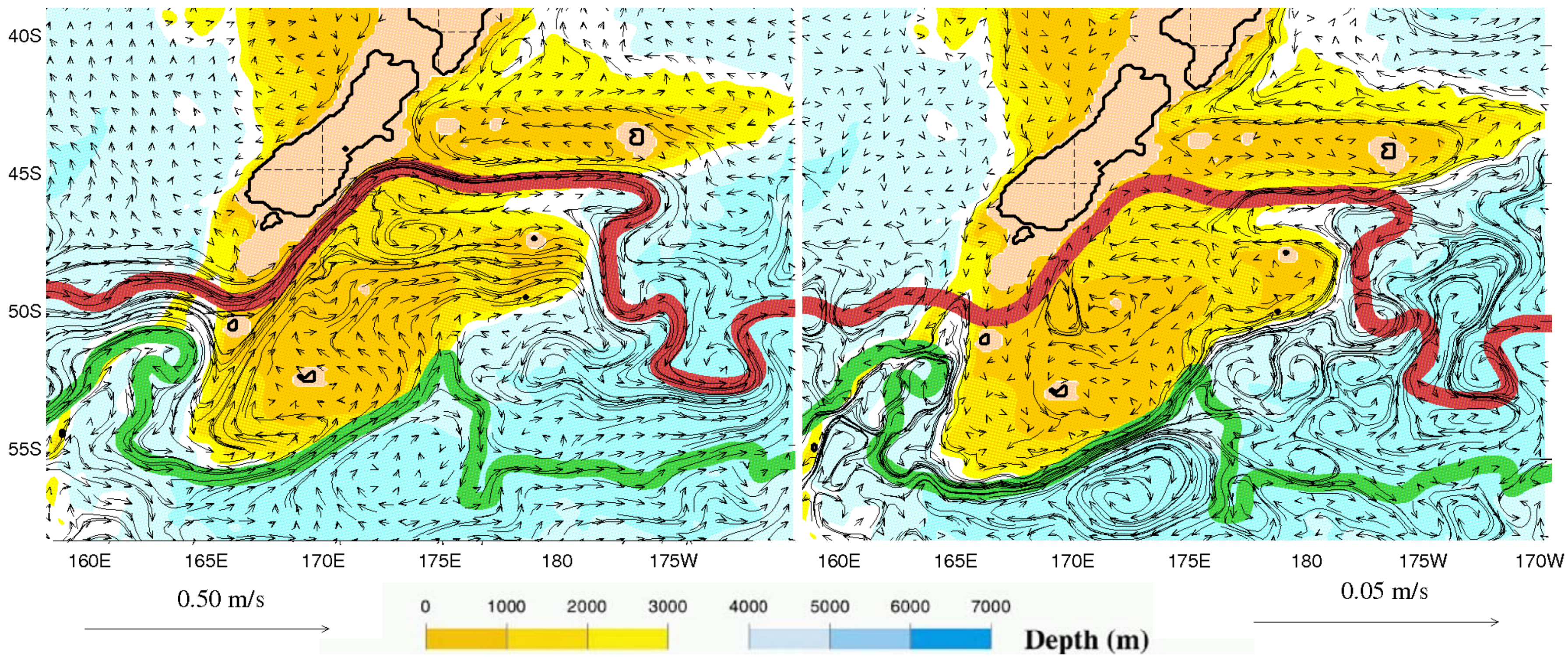
Mean Currents and Sea Surface Height Simulated by (A,B) 1/16° Linear Barotropic Model and (c) the Surface Layer from 1/8°, 6-Layer Flat Bottom NLOM



(A) QuikSCAT-corrected ECMWF ERA-40 climatological wind forcing
(B,C) Smoothed Hellerman and Rosenstein (1983) wind stress forcing

1/8°, 6-Layer NLOM Simulation of Mean Surface and Abyssal Currents East of South Island, New Zealand

Mean currents over bottom topography | **Mean abyssal currents over bottom topography**

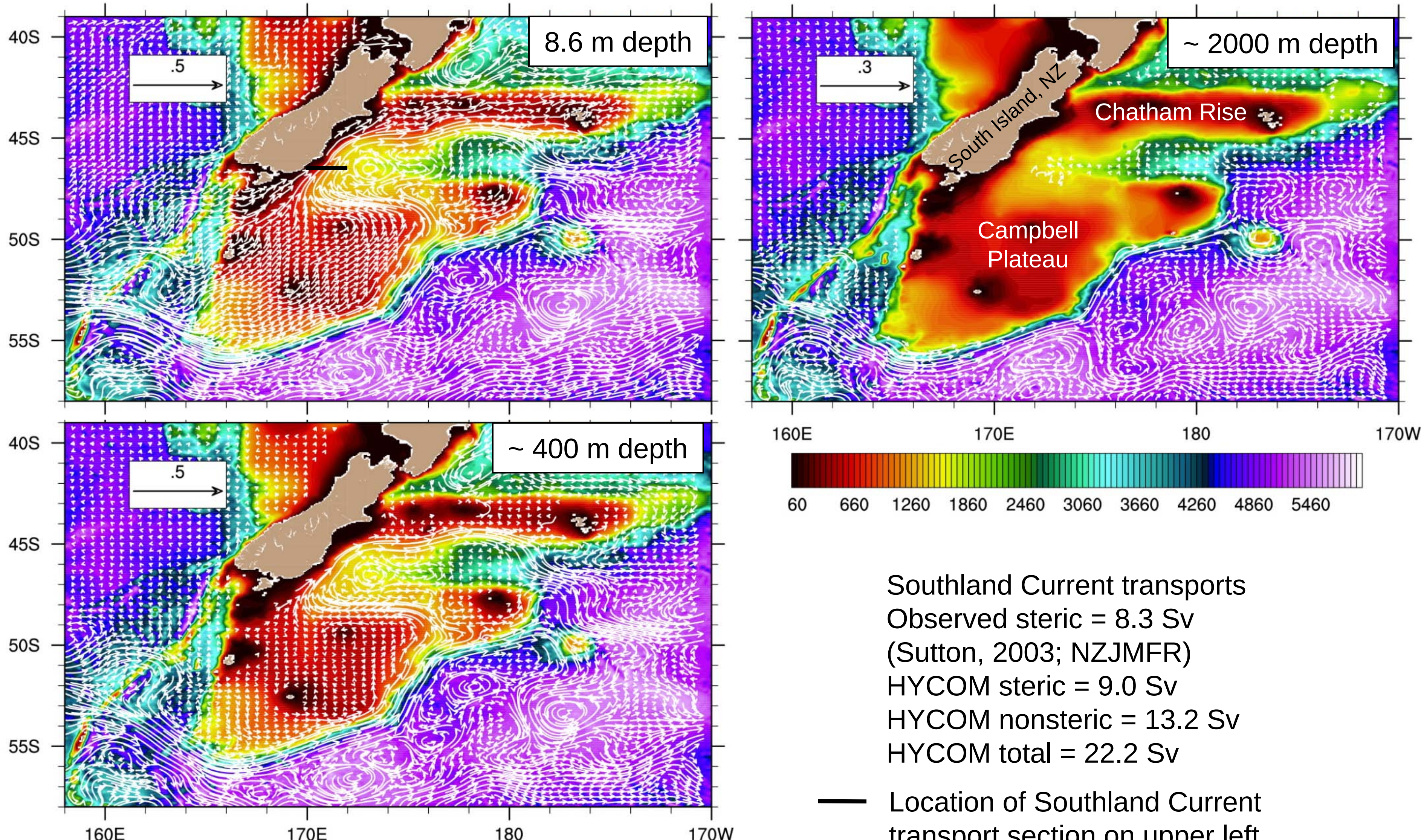


Mean subtropical front (STF)
Mean subantarctic front (SAF)

Smoothed Hellerman and Rosenstein (1983) (HRSM) wind forcing

From Tilburg et al. (2002; JPO)

Mean currents simulated by 1/12°, 32-layer global HYCOM in the New Zealand region overlaid on seafloor depth



Southland Current transports
Observed steric = 8.3 Sv
(Sutton, 2003; NZJMFR)
HYCOM steric = 9.0 Sv
HYCOM nonsteric = 13.2 Sv
HYCOM total = 22.2 Sv

— Location of Southland Current transport section on upper left panel

From Hurlburt et al. (2006, DAO submitted)

Mean sea surface height in the New Zealand region